

COMPARATIVE STUDY ON IDENTITY CRISIS IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S

THE WHITE TIGER AND MOHSIN HAMID'S

THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST

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ABSTRACT

The White Tiger and The Reluctant Fundamentalist present a postcolonial study of individual identity in the society. The post-colonial dialects, subaltern or underclass occupies the prominent place which incorporates everyone in terms of class, caste, age, gender, culture, etc. The lack of identification and recognition in society resist the boundaries and defeat the protagonists emotionally and physically in both the novels. They live helplessly, suffer alone and get a marginal place in the society, history, and culture and they are forbidden as humans by fellow human beings. Both the writers focused on the light of identity crisis, cultural discrimination, political corruptions, and inferiority complex in the socio-economic and culture areas. The novels describe the positive and negative developments of the people of the nations. The identity is the prime concern in the novels of Mohsin Hamid and Aravind Adiga. Both the writers raised many issues in their works such as identity-based on culture. This paper is an attempt to bring out the state of an identity crisis, struggles for existence and economic crisis in the selected novels The White Tiger and The Reluctant Fundamentalist.

KEYWORDS: Identity Crisis, Individual Struggles, Social Crisis & Violence etc.,

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INTRODUCTION

Identity is a beautiful word for some people that they live happily by utilizing their forefather's identity, status and fame. There is no such life without any identity but identity which they have that matters. The Identity has to give an equal place for all in the society. There should be justice for all sorts of people. In reality poverty is not a curse but injustice. People show pride of their nationality, language, religion, region, caste, class, family, ethnicity and talents. Knowing the Individual and Collective Identity of a person, enthruses him to be happy in the present world too and this point is stressed in the writings of both Aravind Adiga and Moshin Hamid. The very important thing is that the two writers belong to the contemporary association of writers in the world arena and both are famous in their respective countries and also in both countries. Fact is that these two writes belong to the 2 Indian Sub - continent which has been divided into two individual countries and that too without much interest of the citizens. Balram, in *The White Tiger* belongs to a low caste and poor family. He struggles a lot to come up in life, at the end of the story he builds an entrepreneurship in Bangalore. Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* struggles with hybridity and cultural identity in America. He goes back to Pakistan in order to live with his true

Identity.

Aravind Adiga is an Indian whereas Moshin Hamid belongs to Pakistan and interestingly enough there are many similarities between these two countries. They are positively wonderful writers and they are also equipped with many powerful writing skills to their individual credit. Their simple and at the same time effective use of language certainly suits to the situations they create in a practical environment. In addition they are committed writers for the welfare of the down trodden, marginalized and subaltern people. These two writers stood for the social, economical and political growth of the alien and neglected people.

THE WHITE TIGER

Aravind Adiga hails from Madras, India, was born on 23rd October 1974. He is the recipient of 40th Booker Prize for his most heart-rending novel, *The White Tiger*, 2008. The novel is the perfect picture of an identity crisis in the nation. It depicts the identity crisis among the marginal tribes in the early free Indian villages. The novel focuses on the struggle of identity by the deprived section of the society to analyze socio-cultural, political and economic spheres to gain success in the daily social life. He raises the question about socio-cultural and economic conditions. His work is an unacceptable representation of India which increased the magnitude of the identity crisis in the society. In his debut novel “The White Tiger”, Adiga focused a darkly humorous perspective of identity crisis in a global world through a retrospective narration from Balram Halwai, a village boy. Adiga’s *The White Tiger* was a book about a man’s quest for identity in the society. It is about a journey of freedom for identity in India’s modern day capitalist society. Adiga portrays how the higher social caste is negative towards the lower social caste.

IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE NOVEL: THE WHITE TIGER

Aravind Adiga’s “The White Tiger” is about a man’s quest for freedom. The novel consists a consecutive series of letters by the protagonist Balram Halwai to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, the visitor to India. The novel provides a darkly humorous perspective of class struggle in a globalized world as told to a retrospective narration from a village boy Balram Halwai. The Chinese Prime Minister Mr. Wen Jiabo visits India to meet the young Indian Entrepreneurs in Bangalore –the Mecca of Information Technology as told by Peerzada Abrar. Mr. Wen meets Balram Halwai during the summit at Bangalore. Balram describes himself as ‘thinking man of action and changes’ (Adiga, 4)’ the self-taught entrepreneur and far superior to educated people. Balram alias Munna narrates his story to Mr. Wen. He says that he hails from the poor village of Laxmangarh in Bihar. His parents led a miserable life but never begged. His father Vikram Halwai, fought his fate with rickshaw-pulling and dream to educate his son. Vikram says:

*My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son
of mine-at least one-should live like a man (Adiga, 30).*

Balram was put to work in a tea-shop to repay debts incurred for his sister’s marriage. Laboring at tea-shop he realized that he was trapped in the vicious cycle of exploitation and decided not to continue as a slave. He would like to make his life beautiful.

Balram continued his confession on the second night that he has murdered his master, Mr. Ashok. He continued his life story, after his father’s death, he left his job as a server in a tea shop, later learned driving for a better economy. His fate landed him at the mansion of ‘Laxmangarh’ to the Thakur Ramdev alias ‘The Stork’ of Dhanbad city. He managed to

appoint as a driver for the Stork's son, Mr. Ashok and felt glad not to crave for food, shelter, and a uniform. Balram identified the differences between caste and class at his master's mansion. Balram hates the creator for creating an imbalanced world.

Balram shares the reality of India's glorious democracy with the Chinese Premier. He has inculcated radical thoughts. He is an admirer of Fidel Castro because Castro threw the rich out of Cuba to empower the poor. Balram shares about the process of election, how democracy is practiced in Laxmangarh with the Chinese Premier. He was the eye witness for the dark side of democracy at his master's mansion. Balram along with his master Mr. Ashok and his wife Pinky shifted to New Delhi to meet the leaders for help in the illegal mining business. Balram envisages that everyone is struggling for their identification in society.

Balram experiences in New Delhi the dark side of democracy. He noticed the exorbitant lifestyle of the rich and the extreme pathos of the poor. Corrupted masters give the bribe to the higher officials in order to get their things done. Balram opines that

*The history of the world is the history of ten-thousand-year war of brains
between the rich and the poor. Each side is eternally trying to hoodwink
the other side (Adiga, 254).*

Balram was educated by his fellow-drivers on how to cope with miserly masters, corrupt policemen, leaders, society and climatic conditions. Balram has to take the blame of the accident done by drunken Pinky madam. The terrific incident taught Balram that his master is not kind enough.

Balram continues to convey his experiences with Mr. Wen; Balram explains an incident which happened in his master Ashok's family. Pinky madam (Ashok's wife) leaves to America without prior intimation to her husband and she asks Balram to drop at the airport. Balram dropped her at the airport. He was rewarded with a fat brown envelope with forty-seven hundred rupees. He faced the anger of his master after coming from the airport for his negligence. He pleaded innocently but his request becomes vain.

The departure of Pinky Madam leaves Mr. Ashok alone. This situation brought loneliness and displeasure towards the life of Mr. Ashok. He gravitated towards call girls due to the isolation he frequently visited malls and hotels for relaxation. Mr. Ashok's search of prostitutes at the red light area satisfied his suppressed revenge as well. Balram witnessed the differences between rich and poor. He predicts the variations would soon be toppled by a revolution of the poor. Balram says:

*Have you heard about the Naxals? ... They've got guns ... a whole army.
They've got stronger by the day ... when the time is right, all of India will*

(Adiga, 208).

Balram becomes vengeful against the rich.

On the sixth night, Balram confesses to Chinese Premier, how he starts to make money by deceiving his master. His greed grows day by day and at the end, he concluded to murder his master. He took all his money and stepped into a bright future and established his own unbeaten identity.

Balram delightfully escaped from the murder and clearly dodges the law and lands in Bangalore. He decided to start a business for taxi service for call center employees. He followed the footsteps of his master, bribing the police, political leaders to get rid of rivals in his business. He soon becomes the owner of a huge firm with a fleet of SUV's and dozens of drivers. He says:

I wasn't alone ... I had thousands on my side! You will see my friends when you visit Bangalore-fat, punchy men swinging their canes harassing vendors and shaking them down for money. I'm taking of the police, of course (Adiga, 299-300).

Balram forgets all the values and ethics in the search of his identity. He claims to be one of the builders of the new India. He says this will never happen unless each poor man starts fighting for himself.

According to Robbie Goh, "Balram Halwai recounts with chilling frankness, his tale of poverty and crime, of a village yokel who turns into a savvy businessman through ruthless ambition. He is the blunt spokesperson of India's Everyman" (Goh 327-344). The protagonist Balram Halwai struggles from age-old slavery, exploitation, and identity. He exposed his deep frustration and anger against the "haves". Balram boastfully picturizes the discrimination of cultural and social issues in society. Adiga depicts both the downtrodden, unpleasant deprived places like Delhi and Bangalore. The marginal people always suffer for their daily bread and butter and identification. They are discriminated, ignored and suppressed on the basis of race, gender, culture, religion, ethnicity, occupation, education and economy by the mainstream.

The White Tiger is all about identity and marginal consciousness. In the novel, the protagonist Balram narrates his life experiences in seven nights to Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of China. He spends his early days under the domination of the landlord and tries to revolt for identity. In childhood, Balram struggles to know his real name. His parents used to call him

'Munna': "Munna? That's not a real name. He was right: it just means boy." (Adiga,13)

The identity 'Balram' is christened by Krishna, one of his school teachers on his first day of school. He is sincere in his studies and always praised by the teachers and authorities. The School Inspector says:

In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals the creatures that comes along only once in a generation? I thought about it and said: The White Tiger; That's what you are in this jungle. (Adiga, 35)

Balram expresses that since the freedom of India, there was an imbalanced growth and development comparatively in Delhi, Bangalore, and Laxmangarh. A place like Laxmangarh is struggling to acquire identity among the prominent places on the geographical locations. The poverty and depravedness of Balram's family didn't allow him to continue the education and joins at the shop with his brother, Kishan. He took all the mean jobs for his livelihood. Balram expected a good education to get a good job in order to become rich but his family conditions dragged him to work. His dream becomes true when a rich landlord hires him as a chauffeur for his son and to look after for his two Pomeranian dogs. Adiga says:

"His eyes seemed full of wonder!

How could two such contrasting specimens of humanity be

Produced by the same soil, sunlight, and water?"

(Adiga, 80)

The deprived section of the society never treated equally with higher caste due to their caste discrimination. They have no identity and recognition in the human world. Their birth and death were compared with animals. Balram decided that he would not die as servant, driver or with an identity as a low born member of Halwai community. He fights to create a new identity as a rich man. Not only Balram, Pinky Madam, Balram's Grandmother, Mr. Ashok and Kusum in "The White Tiger" struggle for their values, living, and identity.

The protagonist Balram decided something furious. He thought to kill Mr. Ashok and steal money to establish his own business. He successfully executed his plan and settled in Bangalore as a successful entrepreneur. He committed the crime for his freedom and betterment. As the famous Urdu Poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz says:

If these poor beasts ever lift up their heads

Mankind would, then, forget all deeds of rebellion.

If they decide, they can own the Universe,

Even chew down the bones of their cruel masters.

(The Dogs: Sain Sucha)

In the novel *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga raised his voice and warns the dominant sections of the society about the danger that may arise if they suppress the powerless. Adiga transmits a strong message that if the suppression and domination may continue, they may become criminals.

THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST

Mohsin Hamid was born on 23 July 1971 in Lahore, Pakistan. He is a Pakistani novelist, writer and brand consultant. He was nominated for Booker prize award for his novels *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *Exit West* (2017). His other famous novels are *Moth Smoke* (2000) *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013). He also authored a book of essays, *Discontent, and Its Civilizations*. His writings have been featured on bestseller lists, adapted for the cinema, and translated into over thirty-five languages.

The novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was written by Mohsin Hamid. He has related the identity issues faced by the immigrants through the prism of identity. He bewrayed the hideous side of American society with its fundamentalist ideologies. Mohsin Hamid's novel arrests the reader's mind about the protagonists' internal and external struggle for identity. The framework of an identity of a particular individual is viewed on the aspects of life and culture, whiteness, blackness, ethnicity, racial background, geographical locations, religion, distinct cultural practices, language, social and political affiliations of a person, his taste for food and his dressing sense are all relevant parts. The protagonist attempts to construct his identity in the world by the past glory of his community. He says:

*Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River
Basin had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted
Underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would
Invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians.*

(Hamid, 34).

The novel has a whole idea of identity and the protagonist tries to reconstruct his identity.

The protagonist Changez in Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is very diligent, hardworking, courteous and generally accepted by the society. Changez belongs to Pakistan. Pakistan is the country where people live among conflicts, marginalization, deprivation, insecurity. They are segregated into pro-Taliban, anti-Taliban, liberals, religious and secular. People always engaged in the conflicts among the groups and it is difficult to capture the identity of the nation. Changez says that the common man has no right in the construction of the nation. The common man is marginalized in his own nation. The circumstances in the nation are not in the hands of a person to define his own identity. Muddasar Nazar in his article *Identity Crisis in Pakistan* expresses that:

*The Post-colonial state of Pakistan is faced with identity- related Challenges,
and is struggling to define, its identity, particularly from the onset of the
9/11 attacks on the United States. Parallel movements are running across
the landscape of Pakistan, as some demand an Islamic State, some a
multinational state, some fight for a secular one, and some a democratic
the Islamic republic, and if Islamic State, again beset with complexity as to
what type of Islamic State-Shia or Sunni-Pakistan should be and to what degree.*

(Nazar, 3)

The conflict between fundamentalism and liberalism highlights the issue of division among the various sections of society. Every group disowns its identity.

Changez, the protagonist leaves to America; where he involved in anti-American activities. He feels a change in behavior of Americans after 9/11. "The propagated images and discourse on terrorism and the attacks of 9/11 thus already have their impact on people, influencing them in such a way that they perceive foreign-looking people with suspicion and presumption of possible terrorist ideas. This happened in the novel as well as in real life after 9/11" (Olson15). He feels inferior due to differences in color, religion, and nation. Gail Ching Liang Low states that:

*The reflected image, after all, is not the self but an image of the self
as Other; identification is hence both recognition and misrecognition*

(Hamid, 194)

Changez tried his best to hide Pakistani identity under the disguise of identity by adopting American culture. "Which is he, the ignorant master or the canny subaltern? And has he sacrificed his identity in pursuit of status?"

(Olsson 2). He was somewhere unhappy with the identity. His attire with a beard makes his identity suspicious as he has a link with Al Qaeda a terrorist group claims 9/11 attack. Changez says, "I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where I belonged, in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither ..." (Hamid, 168).

He faced the humiliation at the hands of citizens of America. It not only crushes his identity and self-respect but also made his identity dubious. Changez's growing beard stresses the fact that he has disassociated himself from America and he belongs to Pakistan and it designates his basic affiliation with his homeland and his roots which lie in Pakistan and not in America. He wished to be "like everyone else," (Kureishi15). He makes an attempt at the love which also fails with Erica. Changez infatuation with Erica does not let him give up his imitation of the American culture. In his desperation to overcome the dilemma of dysfunctional love on the part of Erica, he offers to become Chris. He failed to adopt American culture. He was ready to give up his name, identity, values and culture for the love. Erica's wearing the T-shirt of Chris shows the cultural bond and intimacy that she shares with Chris instead of Changez who has started loving her like a true admirer. "It occurred me that my attempts to communicate with her might have failed in past because I did not know where I stood on so many issues of consequences; I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where I belonged in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither" (Hamid, 56). His attempts work for the time being, but leave an indelible impact upon his identity. Through this novel, Mohsin Hamid exposes how an individual, the society and the government display arrogance, prejudice and discrimination on cultural and racial grounds.

CONCLUSIONS

The novels *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The White Tiger* reflects the malaise, culture, social concerns like inequality, domination, corruption and its negative and reactionary impact upon the identities of people like Changez and Balram. The characters in both the novels regret that even after all the sacrifices and services they rendered, the society never treated them as their ally or friend. The novels had shown the impact of politics and culture can have upon individual identities. The characters point their fingers towards the culture. They think culture is the biggest barrier in the way of identification. Both the novels expose the fact that individual growth always accounts in the nation's growth whereas the self-centered attitude of the individuals is a threat to the progress of society.

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